

CHAPTER 8: HARMONIZING THE MINOR SCALE

Just as the major scale is the source for major key chord progressions, the minor scale provides the harmony for minor keys. The minor scale can be harmonized using the exact same methods brought forth in Chapter 6.

MINOR SCALE TRIADS

To harmonize any minor scale, start by writing it out on the staff. (Let's use the A minor scale: Fig. 1A.) Next, stack a diatonic 3rd interval on top of each scale step (Fig. 1B). Finally, stack another diatonic 3rd interval on top of the second one (Fig. 1C). This last step results in the diatonic triads of the A minor scale.

Figs. 1A-1C



A minor scale

Harmonized in 3rds

Harmonized in triads

Fig. 2 shows the formula for harmonized triads of the minor scale: $i-ii^\circ-bIII-iv-v-bVI-bVII$. Again, lowercase Roman numerals indicate a minor triad, uppercase numerals indicate major triads, and the small circle ($^\circ$) after the ii chord represents diminished. Notice that the III , VI , and VII chords are flatted ($bIII$, bVI , $bVII$). This of course is due to their corresponding scale steps.

Fig. 2

i	ii°	$bIII$	iv	v	bVI	$bVII$
Am	B°	C	Dm	Em	F	G

In Chapter 3 we learned that every minor scale has a relative major scale that shares the same notes and the same key signature. This same "relative" principle applies to minor and major scale harmonies as well. For example, A minor is relative to C major, so they share the same triads. Though they are still in alphabetical order, the sequence starts on a different tonic chord: Am or C (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3

	i	ii°	$bIII$	iv	v	bVI	$bVII$		
A minor:	Am	B°	C	Dm	Em	F	G		
			I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
		C major:	C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	B°

This does not mean that the two keys are the same, though. Am is the central chord in the key of A minor, and C is the central chord for C major. It's just that it can be helpful for memorization purposes to realize they contain the same chords. Once you become accustomed to minor keys, it will be easier to view them as separate entities, apart from major. Until then, here's a reference chart of the harmonized triads in minor keys (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4

Harmonized Minor Scales (Triads)

Key	I	ii°	$bIII$	iv	v	bVI	$bVII$
A minor	Am	B°	C	Dm	Em	F	G
E minor	Em	F^\sharp°	G	Am	Bm	C	D
B minor	Bm	C^\sharp°	D	Em	$F^\sharp m$	G	A
F^\sharp minor	$F^\sharp m$	G^\sharp°	A	Bm	$C^\sharp m$	D	E
C^\sharp minor	$C^\sharp m$	D^\sharp°	E	$F^\sharp m$	$G^\sharp m$	A	B
G^\sharp minor	$G^\sharp m$	A^\sharp°	B	$C^\sharp m$	$D^\sharp m$	E	F^\sharp
E^b minor	$E^b m$	F°	G^b	$A^b m$	$B^b m$	C^b	D^b
B^b minor	$B^b m$	C°	D^b	$E^b m$	Fm	G^b	A^b
F minor	Fm	G°	A^b	$B^b m$	Cm	D^b	E^b
C minor	Cm	D°	E^b	Fm	Gm	A^b	B^b
G minor	Gm	A°	B^b	Cm	Dm	E^b	F
D minor	Dm	E°	F	Gm	Am	B^b	C

MINOR SCALE SEVENTH CHORDS

Once you've harmonized the minor scale in triads, it's easy to harmonize it in seventh chords. Simply stack another diatonic 3rd on top of each of the triads (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5

Fig. 5 shows the harmonic minor scale in seventh chords. The top staff displays the chord symbols: Am7 (i7), Bm7^{b5} (ii7^{b5}), Cmaj7 (^bIIIImaj7), Dm7 (iv7), Em7 (v7), Fmaj7 (^bVIImaj7), G7 (^bVII7), and Am7 (i7). Below the staff, the corresponding guitar voicings are shown in TAB format:

Chord	Am7	Bm7 ^{b5}	Cmaj7	Dm7	Em7	Fmaj7	G7	Am7
TAB	0 2 3 5	2 3 5 7	0 0 2 3	1 2 3 5	3 4 5 7	5 5 7 8	1 0 2 3	0 2 3 5



Again, the closed voicings in Fig. 5 require some pretty outrageous stretches. Fig. 6 demonstrates some more practical (open) voicings for these chords.

Fig. 6

Fig. 6 shows open voicings for the same chords as Fig. 5. Each chord is accompanied by a guitar diagram showing fingerings and fret numbers:

- Am7: 2 1
- Bm7^{b5}: 1 3 2 4 (2fr)
- Cmaj7: 1 3 2 4 (3fr)
- Dm7: 1 3 1 2 (5fr)
- Em7: 1 3 1 4 (7fr)
- Fmaj7: 1 3 2 4 (8fr)
- G7: 1 3 1 4 (8fr)
- Am7: 1 3 1 2 (12fr)

The bottom staff shows the corresponding chord symbols and TAB for these voicings.



Now we have the formula for the minor scale harmonized in seventh chords: i7-ii7^{b5}-^bIIIImaj7-iv7-v7-^bVIImaj7-^bVII7. Again, once you've memorized the formula, it's easy to harmonize the minor scale in any key. Fig. 7 offers a reference chart.

Fig. 7

Harmonized Minor Scales (Seventh Chords)

Key	i7	ii7 ^{b5}	^b IIIImaj7	iv7	v7	^b VIImaj7	^b VII7
A minor	Am7	Bm7 ^{b5}	Cmaj7	Dm7	Em7	Fmaj7	G7
E minor	Em7	F [#] m7 ^{b5}	Gmaj7	Am7	Bm7	Cmaj7	D7
B minor	Bm7	C [#] m7 ^{b5}	Dmaj7	Em7	F [#] m7	Gmaj7	A7
F [#] minor	F [#] m7	G [#] m7 ^{b5}	Amaj7	Bm7	C [#] m7	Dmaj7	E7
C [#] minor	C [#] m7	D [#] m7 ^{b5}	Emaj7	F [#] m7	G [#] m7	Amaj7	B7
G [#] minor	G [#] m7	A [#] m7 ^{b5}	Bmaj7	C [#] m7	D [#] m7	Emaj7	F [#] 7
E ^b minor	E ^b m7	Fm7 ^{b5}	G ^b maj7	A ^b m7	B ^b m7	C ^b maj7	D ^b 7
B ^b minor	B ^b m7	Cm7 ^{b5}	D ^b maj7	E ^b m7	Fm7	G ^b maj7	A ^b 7
F minor	Fm7	Gm7 ^{b5}	A ^b maj7	B ^b m7	Cm7	D ^b maj7	E ^b 7
C minor	Cm7	Dm7 ^{b5}	E ^b maj7	Fm7	Gm7	A ^b maj7	B ^b 7
G minor	Gm7	Am7 ^{b5}	B ^b maj7	Cm7	Dm7	E ^b maj7	F7
D minor	Dm7	Em7 ^{b5}	Fmaj7	Gm7	Am7	B ^b maj7	C7